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Original article
UDC 821.581+81.25
doi: 10.17223/15617793/512/1

Elimination of lacunas in Russian and English translations of *Cat Country* by Lao She

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Abstract. This article presents the results of a comparative study of a Chinese novel *Cat Country* by Lao She and its translations into Russian by Vladimir Semanov and English by William Lyell. It aims at identifying associative and textual lacunas and considering the ways of their elimination in Russian and English texts. Various strategies are used, such as translators' notes and a loan translation technique to convey the specific historical and cultural context of Lao She's work. The features of individual translation solutions have also been analyzed.

Keywords: Lao She, "Cat Country", lacuna, elimination of lacunas, literary translation, translator's note

For citation: Andreeva, Ya.E., Marshaniya, K.M. & Ma, X. (2025) Elimination of Lacunas in Russian and English Translations of "Cat Country" by Lao She. *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta – Tomsk State University Journal*. 512. pp. 5–12. doi: 10.17223/15617793/512/1

Introduction

Lao She's novel *Cat Country* (猫城记, 1932) is often characterized as the author's most controversial work and a turning point in his oeuvre. Nevertheless, it has not been spotlighted by the researchers for a long time. Only after the end of Cultural Revolution in the 1980s–1990s the interest of researchers to Lao She's work has risen in the People's Republic of China [1–3].

The exceptional role of Lao She, who supported the May Fourth Movement, in developing the theme of national character was repeatedly emphasized in Chinese and Soviet criticism. As the researcher Chang Yonghong remarked, Lao She's works had a unique "Beijing flavor" (京味) [4. P. 37]. In his texts, he revealed the national spirit of the Chinese and reflected on the fate of people. In his first novels, written in Great Britain (*The Philosophy of Lao Zhang* (1926), *Zhao Ziyue* (1927), *Mr. Ma and Son* (1928)), Lao She addressed the socio-cultural attitudes and behavioral models of the Chinese, pondered on traditions and rituals of his native country. As the researcher Rodionov notes, Lao She condemns "excessive worship of traditions, conventions in social communication" [5. P. 61]. Besides, he often compared the Chinese and foreigners. It may be explained by his personal experience while living abroad. For instance, he drew psychological portraits of the Chinese and the English in the novel *Mr. Ma and Son*, paying attention to their differences.

Critics pointed out that Lao She's works could convey "a Chekhov's laughter and a Gorky's sadness" (老舍具有契可夫的微笑和戈爾基的苦澀) [6]. In fact, Chekhov's

creativity had a significant influence on Lao She [7]. Chekhov's tradition is particularly evident in Lao She's play *Teahouse* (1957). In this play, the author shows the turning points in the history of Chinese society through the fates of visitors to a Beijing teahouse. In the playwriting of the prominent Russian author, tea ceremony takes place against the backdrop of events that change people's lives (*Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*). This artistic technique becomes a plot-forming component of Lao She's play. Like Chekhov, Lao She was always great at "fusion of tragic with comic" [7. P. 206]. Despite the comic tone, there is always a tragic subtext in his works, which shows the pain and suffering of the people living in an imperfect world.

The problem of a "little man" also plays a crucial role in Lao She's works, for example in such novels as *Divorce* (1933) and *Rickshaw Boy* (1935) [8, 9]. Depicting the life path, aspirations and hopes of a "little man", Lao She always noted that his works were dedicated to common people: "Perhaps because I myself come from a poor family, I have always had deep sympathy for people in need. Due to my professional duties, I had to move in the so-called intelligentsia, but my friends were not always doctors and scientists" [10. P. 9]. This appeal to common people was mainly due to the fact that he wrote in *baihua*, the language of everyday communication.

Although Lao She's general tendency is towards realism, in some of his works (*Little Po's Birthday*, 1931; *Cat Country*) he develops an idea of a travel to the unrealistic world, where the traveler exposes the morals and vices of the society he observes.

According to researchers, it is a powerful tool to use for a satirical and allegorical purpose [5, 11, 12]. It is noteworthy that this theme of a travel to the unrealistic world was quite popular in China at the beginning of the 20th century and was used by other authors, for example, by Zhang Tianyi (*Ghostland Diary*, 1931) and Shen Congwen (*Alice in China*, 1928).

Thus, Lao She's artistic method is a rich and complex tapestry woven from various influences and experiences. It can be characterized by some creative principles such as the portrayal of the national character of the Chinese, the comparison of the Chinese with foreigners, the idea of a travel to the unrealistic world, irony and satire on Chinese society, which manifest patriotism and a deep sense of responsibility to the country, a problem of a "little man".

All the mentioned above creative principles are reflected in Lao She's satirical novel *Cat Country*, where the images of cats represent Chinese society of the 1930s. Describing the life of a fictional civilization of Cat People on Mars, the author depicts social and political realities at the time of the Kuomintang regime. The main character of the novel is a Chinese man from Earth whose spacecraft crashed on the surface of Mars. Trying to survive in a new environment, he gets acquainted with customs and traditions of Cat People society. He observes Cat Country's decline, the collapse of its economy and education system, the ignorance and moral degradation of Cat People, who are addicted to "reverie leaves" [13]. He also witnesses Cat People defeated in the battle with foreign invaders.

Cat Country is the first work written by Lao She after his return from England to China. The writer admitted that he was influenced by English literature and especially by dystopian novels, which was consequently reflected in the plot of his novel [14. P. 494]. It reminds a science fiction novel *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) by Herbert George Wells that tells about the journey of two earthlings to the Moon, which is inhabited by insect-like people and where plants that cause euphoria and hallucinations grow. Another example is a dystopian satirical novel *Brave New World* (1932) by the English writer Aldous Huxley, which describes people who constantly consume a drug called "soma". Researchers also point out some similarities between *Cat Country* and other literary texts, for instance, *Penguin Island* (1908) by Anatole France, which is about a fictitious country Penguinia, populated by humans who are originally the great auks, mistakenly baptized by a Christian missionary monk and then converted to humans by The Lord. The novel *The History of a Town* (1869–1870) by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin is also remarkable for its whimsical plot [15]. It presents an imaginary chronicle of a provincial Russian town of Glupov (Foolsburg). The depiction of strange governors of the town and the events that take place there offers a picture of Russian society of the 18th–19th centuries.

Lao She's works and *Cat Country* in particular attract attention of Russian and foreign researchers. They provoke scientific discussion on several crucial aspects, such as the influence of social and political processes in China of the

first third of the twentieth century on the ideas of the writer [16–18]; the author's attitude to Chinese and European literary traditions (he has been working as a Chinese teacher at the University of London for nearly six years) [5, 19]; questions of human morality and timeless values that resonate with representatives of any culture [20, 21]. However, according to the analysis of some sources on Lao She's works, the translations of *Cat Country* into Russian and English have never become the object of comparative study. The consideration of linguistic and cultural aspects of the literary translation of *Cat Country* is extremely significant not only for a complete understanding of Lao She's novel, but also for the analysis of obstacles in the process of intercultural communication. It allows identifying numerous lacunas (gaps) that represent the specifics of Chinese culture and do not have means of verbalization in the target language. Thus, this article aims to identify lacunas and to consider the ways of their elimination in Russian and English translations of the Chinese satirical novel *Cat Country* by Lao She. It is also crucial to analyze the features of individual translation solutions.

Material and Methods

To conduct a comparative analysis of Russian and English translations of *Cat Country* it is pivotal to provide their historical background. In Russia (USSR that time), Lao She's novel was published in 1969 in the sixth issue of the *New World* ("Новый мир") magazine. The novel was translated by Vladimir Ivanovich Semanov (1933–2010), a translator and researcher. The sphere of scientific interests of the distinguished professor of Moscow State University was connected with Chinese literature of the 19th – early 20th centuries, and the work of Lu Xun (or Lu Hsun in some sources). Semanov also translated some works into Russian, such as *Fate* by Lu Yao, *The Lone Swan* by Su Manshu, *Tales and Stories* by Lu Xun, *In the Valley of the Lotuses* by Gu Hua, *Flowers in the Sea of Evil* by Zeng Pu, and others.

The first publication of *Cat Country* ("Записки о Кошачьем городе") was accompanied by an introductory note of the sinologist Aleksey Zhelokhovtsev, where he tells about the challenges in the process of publishing of Lao She's novel. Despite the fact that the author himself gave up on his satirical novel many times, *Cat Country* managed to become one of the most world famous literary works of the 20th-century Chinese literature. According to Zhelokhovtsev, only "a true patriot, driven by a deep consciousness of public duty, could write such a cruel but truthful book" [22. P. 84].

The author of the English translation of *Cat Country* is William Alfred Lyell (1930–2005). Since 1972, he was a professor of Chinese language and literature at Stanford University. Lyell's writings and research primarily focused on modern Chinese literature, especially the works of 20th-century writers Lu Xun (*The Diary of a Madman*) and Lao She (*Blades of Grass: The Stories of Lao She*). His works also include the translation of *Shanghai Express: A Thirties Novel* by Zhang Hensui, and he is the author of *Lu Hsun's Vision of Reality* [23].

The English translation by Lyell was first published almost at the same time as the Russian translation, in 1970. The text was accompanied by an introductory note of Ian Johnson, a journalist, author and literary critic, who is also the author of *China: When the Cats Rule*, published in "The New York Review" in 2013. As the researcher Ho Koon-Ki Tommy highlights in his article "Cat Country: A Dystopian Satire" (1987), Chinese critics expressed little enthusiasm towards the publication of *Cat Country*. Ho Koon-Ki Tommy found only five Chinese reviews of the novel (all published in 1933–34). References to the novel at that time were mostly negative. Articles with positive criticism began to appear only after 1980. However, outside of China *Cat Country* was welcomed by critics. Ho Koon-Ki Tommy mentioned the works of the English critic-translator Lyell and the Russian critic Fedorenko, who highly appreciated the work of Lao She [17. P. 73].

According to the aim of the article, the following research methods were chosen: the method of comparative analysis, contextual analysis, and the method of linguocultural commentary. They allow observing how two translators, representatives of different cultures, eliminate lacunas in their texts. Some concepts of Chinese culture, historical features, and the specifics of each translation are considered in this research.

Results and Discussion

Lacunas of various types can inevitably occur in the process of literary translation due to national specifics of intercultural dialogue. In a broad sense, a lacuna is everything that is perceived by the translation recipient as incomprehensible. Turning to fiction as a verbal aspect of culture, researchers claim that one of the most relevant problems in the field of translation is the retaining of linguistic and cultural context of the original text. It is undeniable that translation should not be considered only as the transfer of individual linguistic units from one language to another.

The existence of lacunas is explained by the incompatibility of categories and conceptual levels of linguistic worldviews, which reflect a certain system of knowledge, ideas about the surrounding reality, and nationally determined sociocultural values of native speakers. The linguistic worldview is "a certain universal and at the same time nationally specific way of perceiving and organizing (conceptualizing) the world, in which the expressed meanings form a single system of views (collective philosophy), which is imposed as mandatory on all speakers of the language" [24. P. 39]. This way of viewing the world, reflected in language, determines the concept of the "lacunized character" of translation as a type of intercultural communication [25. P. 110]. In this regard, in this study, "lacuna" is considered not only as a lexical gap in the target language, but also as "a discrepancy that arises when comparing conceptual, linguistic, emotional and other categories of two or more linguistic and cultural communities" [26. P. 52].

Specific elements of one linguistic culture, which are not understood by representatives of another culture in

the process of intercultural communication, are considered in a number of Chinese studies within the framework of various terminological apparatuses. The researchers use the following terms to denote lacunas: 文化词语 (cultural words), 文化空缺词 (words-cultural gaps) or 词汇空缺 (lexical gaps), 国俗词语 (words of national customs).

Thus, in Li Jiao's work "A Review of Research on Teaching Chinese Cultural Words", "cultural words" (文化词语) are understood as "words associated with a certain cultural environment and cultural background of a nation" [27. P. 69]. Researchers Dai Weiping and Pei Wenbin point out that cultural words, which inevitably arise in intercultural dialogue, explain differences between China and Western countries in religious traditions, natural environments, traditional concepts, values and social systems [28].

In Chinese linguistics, the understanding of another term, "lexical gap" (词汇空缺), also refers to the unique cultural connotation of such words that cannot be replaced by the equivalents from another culture in the process of translation [29. P. 2496]. Wang Dechun, the author of *Chinese Dictionary of National Customs*, has formed the concept of "words of national customs" (国俗词语), meaning lexical units related to the politics, economics, culture, history, national customs and characteristics [30].

Thus, in Chinese linguistics, according to the considered sources, the concept of "lacuna" is represented by various terms, which can be often interpreted as the absence of a lexical analogue (or at least an unambiguous interpretation) of a particular concept in the target language.

In Russian linguistics, lacunas are considered at various linguistic levels. There is no generally accepted classification of lacunas. In numerous scientific works lacunas are divided into absolute and relative, cultural and linguistic (lexical, grammatical, stylistic), ethnographic, associative, and many others. In humanities and social sciences, lacunary units are classified taking into account the material and direction of research, as well as linguistic and cultural characteristics. A comparative analysis of the original novel by Lao She and its translations into Russian and English shows that the majority of lacunas are author's neologisms and allusions to significant socio-political and cultural events in China of the 1930s. In this regard, this article is focused on the description of associative and textual lacunas.

According to the researcher V.L. Muravyov, associative lacunas are capable of evoking stable associations in native Chinese speakers. However, for recipients of Russian and English translations they might have no sense [31]. Addressing topics of his contemporaries' concern, Lao She touches upon different facts known to Chinese readers, as well as to foreign readers who are familiar with Chinese history to some extent. Thus, a lacuna "reverie leaves" can be easily understood by the translation recipients. It refers to the history of the Opium Wars between the West and China in the 19th century. Another example of associative lacuna is a description of foreign enemies of Cat People: "This was the first time that I had seen the enemy army. In stature, most of them were a bit shorter than

the Cat People..." [13]. It is a reference to the Japanese invasion to Manchuria in 1931, which also evokes certain associations in the erudite reader that help them foresee a turn of the plot and come to particular conclusions.

However, some of the author's allusions are limited to the framework of national culture and a specific historical time, and require certain clarifications. For example, Lao She mentions the existence and confrontation of several "brawls" [13] obsessed with political ambitions. Cat People began to unite in "brawls" after news from abroad that ordinary people could participate in governing their state. The purpose of the brawl of popular government was to expel the emperor. This allusion refers to the Chinese Civil War, which began in 1927 as an armed confrontation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China.

The first thing that attracts attention when comparing the original text of Lao She and the translations of Semanov and Lyell is the title of the novel. The original title of the novel is 猫城记 (猫 – cat, 城 – city, 记 – notes, remarks, essay) is an allusion that is associated with the writer's biography: in 1930 Lao She returned to China after six years abroad and saw the changes in the country. Lyell translated the title as *Cat Country*. In his translation, lexeme "notes" is omitted. This lexeme is important

because it refers to the image of the narrator (a main character of the novel). It is Lao She himself, who hides behind the mask of the narrator and expresses his personal emotions and reaction concerning the events happening in China at that time. In contrast, this lexeme "notes" is retained in Semanov's translation of the title – "Записки о Кошачьем городе".

One of the main ways to eliminate associative lacunas in translation is translator's note. It presents additional information that cannot be integrated into the general text of the translation. This method of filling gaps gives the translator the opportunity to retain the features of the original text without significant changes. It also gives the reader an opportunity to know more about the cultural and historical specifics of another country.

Even a superficial review of Semanov's and Lyell's translations demonstrates that the translators perceive their target audience and estimate the potential readers' background knowledge differently. There is a small number of translator's notes (only three comments at the bottom of some pages) in the Russian text. As for the English translation, it provides 18 linguistic and cultural comments in a special section after the text of the novel. Consider some examples:

Table 1

Associative lacunas in the translations of *Cat Country*

Original text	Semanov's translation	Lyell's translation
走了半天 遇见一群学生 都在地上跪着 面前摆着一大块石头 上边写着几个白字: "马祖大仙之神位" [32. P. 171].	Я пошёл обратно по другой улице и вдруг увидел группу студентов, которые не наслаждались спектаклем или отрубленной головой, как их земляки, а стояли на коленях перед большим камнем с надписью "Памятник великому святому Мацу" [33. P. 282].	But after I had been walking for a while, I finally came upon a group of students. They were all kneeling on the ground. There was a stone laid out in front of them with a few white characters written on it: SPIRIT DWELLING OF THE GREAT IMMORTAL UNCLE KARL [13]
"在古时候 我们的女子有把脚裹得这么小的, 我把大指和食指捏在一块比了一比. "现在已经完全不裹脚了" [32. P. 123–124].	В той стране, где я родился, женщины раньше бинтовали ноги, и они у них были совсем маленькие. Сейчас уже перестали бинтовать... [33. P. 256]	"In antiquity our women sometimes bound their feet until they'd get them as tiny as this". I brought my thumb and forefinger together to give them an idea of the size. "But nobody binds a girl's feet any more..." [13]
迷叶是真正好药 [32. P. 100].	Здесь это универсальное средство. Если уж и оно не помогает – значит, пропал человек [33. P. 242]	Reverie leaves make excellent medicine [13]

In the first example in Table 1, Lyell comments on the anthroponym *Uncle Karl*: "Suggestive of the influential German philosopher Karl Marx, who co-authored *The Communist Manifesto* with Friedrich Engels" [13]. In the original text by Lao She, the Cat People worshiped the saint 马祖 *Mazu*, whose name is similar in sound to the surname "Marx" (马克思 *Makesi*). Despite the fact that the allusive anthroponym 马祖 *Mazu* is not an exact reproduction of the surname "Marx", it is associated with the personality of the famous German philosopher, economist and public figure, author of the works *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*. Marx, as one of the founders of the communist idea, influenced China a lot. The ideas of Marxism were introduced in China at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

The second example in Lyell's translation provides a cultural and historical commentary on the tradition of binding women's feet in imperial China, which was called

三寸金莲 (three cun golden lotus). The translator's explanation clarifies the historical timeframe of the custom: "Towards the end of the nineteenth century, various interest groups such as Christian missionaries, educated women and the feminist movement began to advocate for an end to foot-binding and by the early twentieth century the imperial Qing court and Republican government that came after, made attempts to prohibit the practice" [13]. Lyell's note helps the reader understand the peculiarities of the described time and the society of Cat People. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, there was an active struggle against the custom of "lotus feet", but it took a lot of time to destroy it. Lao She shows that Cat People are not ready for innovations. When the narrator told them that there was no this tradition in China any more, they were astonished: "Why have you stopped binding them? Why? That's a stupid thing to do" [13]. Although Lyell pays attention to this fragment of the text, in Semanov's translation there is no note on it.

In the third example, there is a lacuna *reverie leaves*. Lyell highlights that it is an allusion to opium: "Similarly, opium was often used in China to treat diseases or even minor indispositions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century" [13]. Imported to China by Western powers, opium was initially used for medical purposes. However, opium smoking quickly spread throughout China due to its narcotic properties. The defeat in two Opium Wars had a severe impact on China, leading to economic collapse, civil wars, migration, and total addiction to opium. All these events were described by Lao She as the points of Cat Country's history. It is remarkable that Semanov does not explain the meaning of lacuna *дурманные листья* in his text, giving his readers an opportunity to do it themselves.

The small number of notes in the Russian translation may indicate that, in the translator's opinion, the Russian-speaking reader has an idea of the Opium Wars, the tradition of foot binding of women, the history of the Communist Party in China. So indirect references to these facts are enough for the reader to understand the content of the text. At the same time, the number of Lyell's notes shows that he might have predicted some difficulties in decoding

these allusions by the reader. Therefore, he provides more extra information to eliminate associative lacunas in his translation.

The difference in the number of notes can be interpreted by the established translation tradition, the translators' own ideas about the audience, and the validity of each explanation. However, while working with the original text, both the Russian and English translators might have tried to ensure a sufficient level of understanding of the text by the potential reader.

Textual lacunas are another type of lacunary units that can be identified in the process of comparing translations of the novel. This type of lacunas, described in works by Irina Markovina and Yuri Sorokin, "is determined not by the national specificity of the cultures which the author and reader belong to, but by the particular specification of the text, presented as a tool of communication" [34. P. 153]. According to the works of these researchers, various factors lead to the formation of lacunas, such as the peculiarities of the author's poetics, the genre of the text, the type of reader, etc. There are some interesting examples of intentional textual lacunas such as author's occasionalisms.

Table 2

Textual lacunas in translations of *Cat Country*

Original text	Semanov's translation	Lyell's translation
他的名字叫做猫拉夫斯基 [32. P. 132].	Фамилия его была Кошкарский [33. P. 261]	I learned that his name was Cat Lafuszji [13]
马祖主义万岁! 扑罗普洛立扑万岁! [32. P. 132].	Да здравствует мацизм! Да здравствует пуло-пулап! [33. P. 282]	Long live Uncle Karl-skyism! Long live Pinsky-pansky Pospos! [13]
还有呢, 大家夫斯基主义是给人人以适当的工作, 而享受着同等的酬报 [32. P. 145].	Кроме того, согласно всеизму, каждый человек получает подходящую работу и равное вознаграждение [33. P. 268]	Everybody Shareskyism advocated allocating jobs on the basis of ability while at the same time equalizing compensation for all jobs [13]

The first example refers to the situation when the protagonist of Lao She's story gets acquainted with a young scholar who is a curator at the Museum of Antiquities. Semanov translates the scholar's surname 猫拉夫斯基 *Maolafusiji* as *Кошкарский*. The combination of characters 夫斯基 *fusiji* is traditionally used in Chinese to transliterate surnames ending in *-вский*. Thus, the original text of Lao She is involved in the context of Sino-Soviet intercultural dialogue. Lyell also pays attention to this anthroponym and translates it as *Cat Lafuszji*. In his notes he explains: "In the original Chinese, these foreign phrases resemble the transliteration of the Russian language in Chinese" [13].

A textual commentary on the lexeme 扑罗普洛立扑 *puluopuluolapu* in the second example, which is an errative (a deliberate distortion of the word "proletariat"), is observed in the Russian translation: the word *пулопулап* is a parody of the awkward transcription of the word "пролетариат" ("пулолэталитэ") [33. P. 282]. There is a deliberate mistake in the spelling of the word 普罗列塔利亚特 *puluolietaliyate* in the original text. It is intended to demonstrate that the society of Cat People described in the novel is extremely ignorant and does not understand the content of the words they use. This errative 扑罗普洛立扑 *puluopuluolapu* is translated into English as *Pinsky-pansky Pospos*. Lyell uses the technique of alliteration (repetition of the consonant sound [p] at the beginning of words). It is

worth noting that he does not explain why this errative was translated like that.

There is one more interesting example of translation of Lao She's occasionalism 大家夫斯基主义 *dajiafusiji zhuyi*. In the original text, this lexeme is formed by adding the words 大家 *dajia* (everybody), which conveys the semantic kernel of the word "communism", 夫斯基 *fusiji* (as already noted, the combination of hieroglyphs 夫斯基 *fusiji* is traditionally used in Chinese for transliteration of Russian surnames) and the suffix 主义 *zhuyi*, which is involved in the formation of nouns indicating dogma and ending in *-изм* in Russian. Lyell translates this neologism as *Everybody Shareskyism*. It is equivalently replaced with the lexemes *everybody*, *share* and the suffix *-ism*.

So, lacunas presented in Table 2 are occasionalisms, which are created by the author of *Cat Country* in accordance with the laws of word formation in the Chinese language. The author's neologisms and erratives are used by Lao She as a lexical means of artistic expression and as a way to portray the characters. The comparison of the text fragments in Table 2 demonstrated that Semanov and Lyell took into account the word-formation model used by Lao She while creating his occasionalisms.

The loan translation method was used for such author's occasionalisms as 马祖主义 (мацизм, *Uncle Karl-skyism*), 大家夫司基主义 (всеизм, *Everybody Shareskyism*), as well as the anthroponym 猫拉夫司基 (Кошкарский, *Cat Lafuszji*). The errative 扑罗普落扑 (пулопулан, *Pinsky-pansky Pospo*) was translated into Russian and English by means of phonetic compensation. Thus, when translating Lao She's occasionalisms, Semanov and Lyell create their own ones.

The translation solutions by Semanov and Lyell are different and unique in the choice of techniques for eliminating the gaps.

It is worth noting that Semanov's translation is different from Lyell's one in style and language means (informal words are used), it has a wider range of transformations (author's additions and lexical substitutions). Table 3 shows some text illustrations:

Table 3

Translation solutions

Original text	Semanov's translation	Lyell's translation
路过一个图书馆, 我不想进去看, 恐怕又中了空城计 [32. P. 136].	Показавшаяся впереди библиотека вновь сулила "хитрость с пустой крепостью" [33. P. 263]	I passed a library and felt like going in to have a look, but was afraid of being the victim of an empty-bookshelf hoax [13]
大家虽然闭着眼, 可是似乎能用鼻子闻到响声——一片叶子落地的那点响声——立刻全睁开眼, 嘴唇一齐吧唧起来 [32. P. 51].	"Нюхатели" не видели и не слышали его мягкого падения, но, казалось, чуяли носом: они мгновенно открывали глаза, шевелили губами, однако Большой Скорпион всегда опережал жаждущих [33. P. 214]	If by chance a ripe leaf fell from a tree, they would immediately open their eyes, and their mouths would twitch in anticipation. It was almost as though they had perceived the faint sound of the falling leaf with their noses! [13]
你看, 我们自古以来总是皇上管着大家的, 人民是不得出声的 [32. P. 142].	С древности мы беспрекословно подчинялись императору, не смели даже пискнуть и считали высшей добродетелью так называемую моральную чистоту [33. P. 266]	You see, since ancient times the emperor has kept a tight reign on everyone, and the common people were never allowed to express their opinions [13]

In the first example, the author uses Chinese idiomatic expression 空城计 (empty city maneuver). It is based on the story about the military ingenuity of the legendary commander from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Semanov explains that this is an allusion to the legend about a famous Chinese commander Zhuge Liang (3rd century), who, left without an army, opened the city gates to the enemy. Frightened by the ambush, the enemy retreated from the walls of the fortress. When the narrator (the main character of *Cat Country*) examined the museum and the library in Cat City, he discovered that there were no exhibits and books. Semanov made a decision to keep this idiom as a unique author's reference to Chinese culture. Foreseeing some difficulties for the Russian reader to understand the author's idea, he translated this idiom literally and added his note.

Lyell translates the same idiom as *an empty-bookshelf hoax* using the descriptive method of translation because Chinese idioms come from ancient treatises, literary texts, myths and legends, which require extensive cultural and historical knowledge from readers.

In the second example, the stylistically neutral pronoun 大家 (everybody) is replaced with the neologism *нюхатели* by Semanov. Lyell uses a neutral equivalent replacement with the pronoun *they* in his translation.

In the third example, the Chinese lexeme 出声 (to make a sound) was translated into Russian with the stylistically marked (informal) verb *пискнуть*. Lyell translates this Chinese lexeme as *to express their opinions* using an equivalent replacement without any stylistic connotation, as in the original text. The comparative analysis shows that Lyell tries to copy the stylistic manner of the original text. In Semanov's translation there are freer lexical and stylistic transformations.

Moreover, in the third example, Semanov provides some additional information: "...и считали высшей добродетелью так называемую моральную чистоту" [33. P. 266]. Apparently, moral purity (моральная чистота) refers to the philosophical principle 道德 as a concern for the welfare of the people, "the highest political ideals, the basic principles of human life, concentration of power, moral principles" [35. P. 43]. Therefore, Semanov alludes to the traditions of the national morality of China and allows the Russian reader to understand why Cat People unquestioningly obeyed the will of the emperor since ancient times.

Conclusion

The analysis of the historical and cultural context, ideological and plot originality of the novel *Cat Country* by Lao She, as well as the study of its translations into Russian and English, made it possible to identify associative and textual lacunas. These lacunas appear due to the reflection of the social, political and cultural situation in China in the 1930s, on the one hand, and the variety of the author's neologisms, the translation of which is complicated by structural differences between the source language and the target languages, on the other hand.

Based on the contextual use of lacunas presented in this study and on the findings of specific translation decisions, some features of the translations under analysis have been pointed out. First and foremost, translations of Semanov and Lyell differ in the number of translator's notes. In most cases, these notes clarify the information about some historical events, cultural phenomena and specific author's word formations. Lyell's numerous notes perform an explanatory function, helping to compensate for his potential reader's

lack of knowledge about Chinese culture. There are much fewer notes in Semanov's translation, which may be caused by the translator's own ideas about the validity of each explanation.

On balance, the research demonstrates that the English translation of *Cat Country* is characterized by a more literal

reproduction of the original text and selective notes containing factual information on the historical and cultural context of the novel. At the same time, the Russian text is distinguished by a greater number of translation transformations, sometimes emotional and free, which reflect the individuality of the translator.

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Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

*The article was submitted 04.11.2024;
approved after reviewing 25.01.2025; accepted for publication 31.03.2025.*

*Статья поступила в редакцию 04.11.2024;
одобрена после рецензирования 25.01.2025; принята к публикации 31.03.2025.*